

Socio-Cultural Representations of Kin Relationships: Elephant Love, Bonds and Beyond

Indika Bulankulame

ABSTRACT

My grandfather Mr. H.B. Udurawana had a great love for elephants and was the proud owner of the largest elephant in captivity. Throughout history it is evident that elephants were domesticated as pets, used by kings, warriors at war, engaged in religious activities and also assisted in transport activities (Jayawardana 1994). D'Oyly (1809) writes about the elephant establishment of the Sinhala king. Even today they hold an awe inspiring position and have a majestic presence in society.

In this presentation I seek to synthesise how the socio-cultural link between upper class families and the acquisition of elephants became a status symbol and a representation of wealth and prosperity in the 20th and 21st centuries.

On one hand, this is a personal narration of how families created this space for ownership and on the other hand, it seeks to contextualise how socio-economic structures created symbolic representations.

Today, the changing perspectives of modernity challenge the elephant in this context of reverence. Therefore, through the examination of personal diaries, interviews and oral history, I reconstruct a narrative of history with this majestic animal and examine the relationship between families that owned elephants in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *Socio-cultural representations, kin relationships, socio-economic structures*

Dept. of Social Studies

The Open University